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Transcribed by Kara Kralik 06/11/2020

*[Pages are numbered at the top. Top right corner of first page is torn off of the letter.]*

Sumner T. Bernstein

Dear Ones -

We left "somewhere on the West Coast" for "a port somewhere on the West Coast" this morning and arrived here in time to get a look at the ship. This will probably be a pretty jumbled report and impression of a very important day in my young life. Here goes:

We marched to the boat which was to take us to the Port of Embarkation. It was a windy day, bright with the sun. Everything looked very sharply defined through my sun glasses. The gulls were soaring and banking, but flapping in vain if they tried to fly right into the wind. The water was as rough as Casco Bay on a rough day; the boat was a little larger than an Island Steamer. It reminded me somewhat of home - the army atmosphere naturally denied a full impression of Portland-by-the-Sea. Censorship & secrecy at "somewhere" is maintained to some degree for practice. Despite this we marched to the dock in full view of neighboring townspeople - it was quite a walk since we assumed we would go by train to this point. Soon we caught sight of a boat and we had

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moved to the waterfront and the embarkation area. The band was there playing "Shoo Shoo, Baby," and "The Beer Band Polka," and, of course, "Over There" and "Hail, Hail." (Just before we came in view of the pier we could see a flag - someone commented "There's a flag" - the retort was - "What flag, the Japanese?! We've walked far enough!") There we were, the band moving around trying to get shelter from the wind, still playing songs like "Tiger Rag" and "String of Pearls." We walked up our first gangplank - we knew that this was only the first time - at the port we would walk up that

real gangplank. This was just the preliminary. We walked under the signs telling us that the 3 Branches of Service equipped, trained, and protected us - now "it is up to you." Most of us were aware of this before we started this boat trip. In fact, the whole atmosphere of our crowd is markedly a lack of tension, an excellent good humor, a casual interest in the crucial things going on around us. Typical repartee: "Are you excited?" "Only a little, I haven't been at sea for a long time" "Hell, you've been at sea all your life!" Corny, but o.k. A good sign. Up on the top deck we could see the embar-

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kation of the troops: The Negroes who sang the cadence so cheerfully as they marched to the boat but then complained, as they were led to the lowest deck, "we're always stuck on the bottom." We could also look out and see the civilians watching our every move - we wondered how many had adding machines for accuracy in their reports to the Gestapo! At any rate we cursed the secrecy which covered our end of the activity yet its openness to any civilian passerby. Oh, well, we need practice in security; there can never be too much of that; no real complaint - just an Army gripe! We still had not received mail for some 6 days.

4 cute WACs in their coveralls (filled out much better than by the ordinary GI, naturally!) came along and I thought the boat would tip over as everyone rushed to one side. One soldier got himself a goodbye kiss. They were cute all right - any girl would look fine when we think of what sort of women we may be meeting in our travels.

While we admired the excellent system used in embarkation, the band moved up for a final salute. We spotted a Major who had grabbed a sax and

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was merrily tooting away. Everyone cried for a solo; he refused that and commented that we ought

to be satisfied “since you have to be good to have me play for you.” Before we knew it, there were 3 sharp blasts and my first GI boat ride was underway.

The trip down was marked by one big event - I got a letter from home! One of the officers had picked it up just before signing out. I was very lucky; it was your letter of April 30. Needless to say, all the stuff about my stay in California & my visits to 'Frisco are definitely passé. I haven't seen The Bulletin with my note to Eddie as yet - I don't even recall writing to him, maybe I did - The only other thing on the trip was the comment by one of the boys as we watched the airplanes overhead that one of these days we might be a little more careful to check identifying features of the planes around us. How true!

And here we are on another boat - of prewar vintage, one of a commercial line. 6 of us in a room, relatively comfortable. A stop-off on the pier for Red Cross refreshments was the only break between our first boat and this, the real thing. And now you are up to date and I need a good night's sleep. That's today's story.